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SUBJECT: NEWS FROM THE FARC FRONT

Summary

1. (U) On November 20, President Uribe authorized Peace Commissioner Restrepo to organize an international commission to help facilitate a hostage exchange with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Restrepo had earlier called on the FARC to commit itself to a cease-fire and peace talks on November 16 when he presided over the group demobilization of the FARC's "Norma Patricia Galeano" front. The international commission and group demobilization contrast with the FARC's two recent messages reaffirming its revolutionary goals and enticing Colombian military desertions. (Over 4,000 FARC terrorists have deserted during the Uribe Administration.) The FARC statements highlight the organization's intransigence. End summary.

Uribe Authorizes International Commission

2. (U) In a new initiative to overcome the impasse in hostage exchange negotiations, President Uribe directed Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo to work with an international commission to negotiate a prisoner swap with the FARC. The GOC and FARC have been unable to agree on the swap location and the security provisions of those areas. Leading daily El Tiempo reported that Restrepo had discussed the international commission idea while on his recent trip to France and Switzerland. El Tiempo added that the initiative came about as a response to Ingrid Betancourt's mother, Yolanda Pulecio's, most recent request that the GOC not use military force to free her daughter. On November 12, Pulecio publicly announced that Uribe did not qualify for re-election, since her daughter was still captive, contending that the GOC had failed to obey necessary procedures to allow competitive elections. Although her contention was largely dismissed, the GOC has attempted to revive the humanitarian exchange negotiations and show some movement on the issue.

First FARC Group Demobilization

3. (U) On November 16, 24 members of the urban FARC "Norma Patricia Galeano" front in Ibagu, Tolima Department demobilized as a group, voluntarily surrendering their arms and joining the civil reintegration program. The front had been operational in the Ibagu/Espinal areas since 1987. Restrepo attended the ceremony and called on the members of

the FARC Secretariat to agree to a cease-fire and to begin peace talks with the GOC. In exchange for their weapons, the members received four radios, antennas, and cell phones to facilitate communication with city officials. Including the latest 24 demobilizations, over 4,100 members of the FARC have deserted during the Uribe Administration and almost 1,000 have rejoined society.

FARC Reaffirms Struggle

14. (U) Despite these initiatives, judging by two recent statements, the FARC appears as intransigent as ever. On October 30, the FARC railed against the Constitutional Court's reelection decision and vowed to continue to struggle against the administration. The statement addresses a range of Colombian political issues and is worth quoting in its entirety to demonstrate the organization's mindset.

Begin informal translation:

Communique of the FARC

-- The recent Constitutional Court decision, which clears the path for immediate reelection, buries the independence of the Colombian government's separate branches of power without honor or glory. The political machinery mocked the principles and 1991 constitutional ban against reelection. The majority of Congress, and the Courts that changed the constitutional provision, aside from some honorable exceptions, were bought cheaply with deceitful Uribe politicking, contributing to the appearance of cowardly evasion like that Mr. Andres Pastrana.

-- Uribe, the U.S. government, rightist businesses, and mafia-like paramilitaries fueled by the press, radio, television, and misleading polls, think they have cleared the path to advance with their "Democratic Security." It is a policy of armored vehicles, neo-liberal politics, and of war and hunger against the citizenry. This coalition is consistent with a civil-military dictatorship led by the President. They do this because they feel their class interests are not protected; because it advances the general and political crisis; and because they have begun to feel the tremors of growing dissatisfaction among the lower classes.

-- Uribe has demonstrated he is not interested in Humanitarian Exchange, much less a peace agreement with the FARC. For us, it is clear that as long as Uribe remains, we will not be able to reach common ground.

-- The Uribe Government has failed with its war strategy. The next four years will be marked by gunpowder and blood; neither the poor nor social programs are the government's priority. At a minimum, the democratic forces and the revolutionaries will need to agree to a program that includes political solutions, Humanitarian Exchange, the end of Plan Colombia and Plan Patriota, not signing the Free Trade Agreement, Social Investment and Agrarian Reform, thus ensuring that this President and his thieving allies do not push the country into a situation far worse than the Colombia of the 1950s. They have already attacked liberals who did not share their vision.

-- The electoral campaign in progress is painted as a new Uribe-centered play, where the State mechanisms, official and para-statal, armed with weapons, chainsaws, contractors, and bureaucrats with an 105 billion peso national budget and millions of dollars from the Ralito (paramilitary) mafia at its disposal to perpetuate its reign of tyranny indefinitely.

-- We are convinced we are among the majority: those of us who oppose these machinations and seek a democracy with political solutions, social justice, and sovereignty. Consequently, we call for a different choice, to put common strategy first and create meeting places where forces can come together to reverse the advances of the dictatorship.

Secretariat of the Central Command, FARC

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Mountains of Colombia, October 30, 2005

End text.

FARC Promotes Colombian Military Desertions

¶5. (U) The FARC Secretariat repeated in an October 20 statement its desertion message directed at the Colombian military, this time directing the plea specifically at the sergeants "on the front line." It urges them stop "being dogs of the oligarchy." The message concludes by saying that they hope the military and police will help advance a humanitarian exchange with the FARC to "free prisoners in the midst of conflict."

¶6. (SBU) The October 20 message uses the same tactics used by the GOC to encourage guerrillas to desert the ranks, according to Col Jairo Uribe, Director of the Army's civil affairs branch. The GOC primarily uses radio ads or leaflets to inform guerrillas about desertion and reinsertion options.

In addition to outlining the benefits and incorporating patriotic themes, the GOC tapes personalized messages from FARC deserters in different areas and broadcasts specialized entreaties to different fronts. Col Uribe reported that the Colombian military owned over 45 radio stations across Colombia and broadcasted a new message to their area each week. He noted that the messages were more powerful coming from former FARC members known to the rank and file.

DRUCKER